



Usurping the Apocryphal: Antonio Muñoz Molina's Cosmopolitan Memory of Max Aub's Rhetoric of Testimony

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Usurping the Apocryphal:
Testimony and Cosmopolitan Memory of the Holocaust and the Spanish Civil War
(The Case of Max Aub and Antonio Muñoz Molina)

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Abstract

This article explores Antonio Muñoz Molina's recuperation of Max Aub's literary testimony of uprootedness for Spanish national culture. Muñoz Molina's reading is inflected by the concept of cosmopolitan memory as it has been developed in Holocaust studies. Muñoz Molina's recuperation can be critiqued for his controversial use of the Holocaust as a template for a transnational cultural history based on a supposedly shared Jewish past. Muñoz Molina generalizes on two levels: he turns Aub into an exemplary witness of two historical junctures—the Spanish Civil War and World War II—and he subsumes both junctures under the general rubric of totalitarianism. As a result, Muñoz Molina paradoxically downplays Aub's main tropes of testimony, the alias and the apocryphal, and disregards his testimonial poetics of alterity, plurivocality, and opacity in favor of a rhetoric of equivalence, univocality, and self-evidence that is derived from cosmopolitan memory. Thus Muñoz Molina turns Aub into a precursor whose place he tries to symbolically usurp—along with other Jewish authors, Aub is made to occupy a trans-historical *topos* to which Muñoz Molina wants to discursively return.

Keywords

Antonio Muñoz Molina, Max Aub, Spanish Civil War, Exile, Historical Memory, Holocaust, Jewishness, Cosmopolitan Memory, Testimonial Rhetoric, Trauma, National Culture

I. Introduction: Sepharad and Testimony

Present-day Spain is the result of an irreparable “cataclismo,” “[i]gual que lo que sucedió con la cultura centroeuropea después de la II Guerra Mundial” (Muñoz Molina, “Muchos” n. pag.). The author of this statement, Antonio Muñoz Molina, likens the cultural consequences of the Spanish civil war and Franco's dictatorship to those brought about by “la irracionalidad” and “el fascismo” in continental Europe (“Caso” n. pag.). Relations of equivalence predominate in Muñoz Molina's writings on authors of testimonies. The title of his 2001 partially fictionalized compilation of testimonial narratives, *Sefarad*, further invokes this play of metaphorical equivalences, inasmuch as it constitutes “a metaphor of destruction, expulsion, or loss,” “the

place one wants to come back to” (Muñoz Molina, “Company” n. pag.). Muñoz Molina’s Sepharad (the Sephardic name for the Iberian Peninsula) equates the exile of Jews from Spain in the fifteenth century and the exile of Spanish Republicans fleeing Franco’s repression in the twentieth century.

Consequently, Sepharad stretches beyond the imagined community of Spanish exiles persecuted since early modernity to encompass “secular and progressive” European Jewish authors who suffered the consequences of the “cataclismo único en la historia del mundo” that shook twentieth century Europe (“Max” 120). Among these authors are Primo Levi and Jean Améry—two prominent Jewish survivors of Auschwitz whose writings shape current understandings of Holocaust testimony—, along with “the great writers of the Civil War era,” “the new Sephardim,” “democrats” such as Max Aub, a Spanish Republican exile born in France (Muñoz Molina, “Company” n. pag.). Muñoz Molina’s book stretches the metaphor even further to include “people who are sick and are exiled by their illness” (“Dreaming” n. pag.). From this now trans-historical perspective, Muñoz Molina draws what I consider to be a questionable global equivalence: “todo el mundo es judío o puede ser judío en cualquier momento ... Cualquiera puede tener su Sefarad. Todos somos posibles condenados” (“Todos” n. pag.). Sepharad, Muñoz Molina’s master metaphor of destruction, expulsion or loss, thereby becomes a problematic trope that universalizes experiences of victimhood.¹

When read against the backdrop of Max Aub’s testimonial writings, Muñoz Molina’s texts on Europe’s deadly twentieth century underscore the problems in creating or promoting a cosmopolitan memory inflected by testimonies of the Holocaust. His discussions of the memory of victimhood are deeply shaped by his misreading of Aub’s testimonies of exile and loss. He treats Aub as a key witness to both the Spanish Republican exile and “una especie de guerra civil

europea” lasting more than thirty years (“Max” 121). Although Aub’s life and works do belong to these two general contexts, Muñoz Molina tends to politically and rhetorically universalize Aub’s specific historical position in both, to the extent that Aub comes to embody Sepharad. Thus remembered, Aub’s complex experiences and testimonies lose their singularity.

Muñoz Molina’s misreading downplays Aub’s main tropes of testimony: what I will call the alias and the apocryphal, characterized by a rhetoric of alterity, plurivocality and obscurity. Muñoz Molina instead favors equivalence, univocality and self-evidence and thereby turns Aub into a precursor whose place he tries to symbolically usurp: along with other Jewish authors, Aub is made to occupy a trans-historical *topos* to which Muñoz Molina “wants to come back to” (“Company” n. pag.). In this essay I contrast Muñoz Molina’s testimonial rhetoric with that of Max Aub. As shall be seen, these different rhetorics should not be viewed as constituting a binary opposition but, rather, as different textual strategies highlighting in varying degrees the uncanniness of testimony.² In contrasting these two rhetorics, I will address three relevant questions in contemporary memory studies: how the globalization of Holocaust memory can decontextualize and relativize testimony, how so-called cosmopolitan memory can be used to foster one’s imagined national culture, and what kind of testimonial literature may best help memorialize, in a transnational context, specific experiences of repression.

II. Antonio Muñoz Molina’s Rhetoric of Equivalence, Univocality and Self-Evidence

Muñoz Molina’s gesture of multicultural assimilation intervenes in a Spanish cultural field marked by questions about a common European memory insofar as the invocation of the Holocaust inescapably shapes current debates about the historical memory of the Spanish civil war (Muñoz Molina, “Destierro” 92). The existence of a Spanish literary tradition about the

Holocaust was still largely ignored at the turn of the twenty-first century due to Spain's tangential position with respect to the Final Solution (Gómez L.-Quiñones 59). As Dan Diner has argued, the Spanish Civil War forms part of a "historical constellation of European crises," but the Civil War and the Holocaust belong to "different spaces" of historical reference (8). Yet, the rhetoric of the Holocaust has recently offered a significant set of criteria for representing and understanding repression during the Spanish war and the Francoist dictatorship (Moradiellos 379). The term genocide was loosely used during the so-called "guerra por la memoria" that took place in Spain during the first decade of the twenty-first century (Marco 27). The issues debated ranged from the commemoration of politically repressed victims buried in Spanish mass graves to the arrest of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet on the principle of universal jurisdiction. In this context, Paul Preston's 2011 *The Spanish Holocaust*, an investigation of the atrocities committed by Franco, has stirred a heated debate about how to characterize and name Francoist repression.³

The term "Spanish Holocaust" relates to two recently developed concepts in sociological memory studies: cosmopolitan memory and multidirectional memory. These two perspectives take Holocaust memory as their "paradigmatic object of concern" (Rothberg 6). As Daniel Levy argues, the notion "cosmopolitan memory" uses the Holocaust as a template for the "creation of a European cultural history" and, thus, helps to develop transnational memories which could serve as a basis "for global human rights politics" (Levy, Sznajder 87). Multidirectional memory shows how one's own identity can be "a borrowing or adaptation from a history that initially might seem foreign and distant" (Rothberg 5). According to Michael Rothberg, remembering the Holocaust can contribute to the "articulation of other histories" of victimhood (6). In this sense, both Preston and Muñoz Molina would be loosely borrowing or adapting from the history of the

Holocaust in order to rearticulate the memory of Franco's repression. However, Rothberg also insists that such borrowings be clearly drawn and that they recognize the uniqueness of historical circumstances and lived experiences. Thus, parallels between historical spaces of reference such as the Spanish civil war and the Holocaust should be distinctly defined (Gómez L.-Quiñones 65).

Andreas Huyssen has warned that global memory "will always be prismatic and heterogeneous rather than holistic or universal" (35). The use of the Holocaust as a paradigm in cosmopolitan memory faces criticism precisely because the Nazi extermination of the European Jews is taken to be "a particular event" and its mourning is grounded in "a specific place and cultural tradition." Holocaust memory, therefore, "cannot be easily appropriated everywhere" (Assmann, Conrad 8-9), even when the Holocaust is used as a paradigm to lay the foundation for a universal understanding of human rights, based on generic notions such as a "commonly remembered barbarism" (Assmann 14). A key figure in this polemic is Holocaust survivor Jean Améry, considered by Muñoz Molina as a "héroe" against "la irracionalidad" and "el fascismo" ("Caso" n. pag.). Yet Améry not only decried the equating of Bolshevism and Nazism and the indiscriminate use of broad terms such as totalitarianism to refer to Hitler's Reich, he also predicted how the term Holocaust would be immersed within a larger frame of reference such as "century of barbarism," and thus would become progressively indistinguishable from the term genocide (79-80). As he knew, claims of universality can lead to fetishizing or trivializing trauma. Also, the indiscriminate use of master metaphors or broad terms such as "barbarism" to link specific traumatic events can misrepresent not only the particular circumstances of the Holocaust, but the idiosyncratic testimony and experiences of a writer like Max Aub. With a touch of black humor, José Naharro Calderón, for instance, alludes to the inadequacy of such indiscriminate use of cosmopolitan memory by remembering Aub's internment at a

concentration camp as “una especie de ‘solución final’ ma non troppo” (116). Thus, if Aub’s rhetoric of testimony is to be understood in the light of cosmopolitan memory, it would be necessary to posit a cosmopolitanism able to address, as Kwame Anthony Appiah argues, the challenge of reconciling “a kind of universalism with the legitimacy of some forms of partiality” (223).

Max Aub Mohrenwitz holds an eccentric, even exceptional position in twentieth century Spanish political and cultural history. He was born in Paris in 1903 to a French mother and a German father, both agnostics of Jewish descent. At the outbreak of the First World War, his family moved to Valencia, Spain, where Aub, aged eleven and a speaker of French and German, learned Spanish. In the early twenties, he became a Spanish citizen and in 1939, when Franco’s troops occupied Barcelona, he returned to Paris. About a year later, on the eve of the Nazi occupation, he was anonymously and falsely denounced as “súbdito alemán (judío) ... notorio comunista y revolucionario” (Malgat 90). Aub spent more than two years in jails and concentration camps. He was first taken to Le Vernet, one of the camps set up in southern France for refugees from the Spanish war. In 1941, he was sent to the Djelfa concentration camp in Algeria. When he was finally released in 1942, he escaped to Mexico, where he died thirty years later, after publishing his five-volume cycle of testimonial novels about the civil war, *The Magic Labyrinth*.

Aub’s book of testimonial poetry, *Diario de Djelfa*, was published in 1944. In 1945, only a few years after fleeing concentration camps, he wrote an agonized description of his fate:

¡Qué daño no me ha hecho, en nuestro mundo cerrado, el no ser de ninguna parte! El llamarme como me llamo, con nombre y apellido que lo mismo pueden ser de un país que de otro... En estas horas de nacionalismo cerrado el haber nacido en París, y ser español,

tener padre español nacido en Alemania, madre parisina, pro de origen también alemán, pero de apellido eslavo, y hablar con ese acento francés que desgarró mi castellano, ¡qué daño no me ha hecho! (*Diario* 128-129).

Aub was constantly wondering about the reasons for his alienation: “¿Por qué ando lejos de todos los convites? ¿Por qué soy el ‘raro’? ... ¿Qué soy? ¿Alemán, francés, español, mexicano? ¿Qué soy? Nada” (“*Diarios*” 108, 273). These questions point at Aub’s undecidable identity and therefore at his exceptional position in the twentieth century Spanish cultural field. Aub felt the effects of alienation and uprootedness on his life, work and political activism. It could be argued that he was always already an exile. At least, in the specific historical circumstances in which he lived, the combination of his ethnic, geographic, patronymic and linguistic conditions invariably contributed to his estrangement. Extrapolating Paul Gilroy’s idea that some identities can be more appropriately approached in terms not only of roots but, primarily, of routes, Aub’s experience could be said to be one of other-rootedness and other-routedness (19).

Muñoz Molina considers Aub, like Holocaust survivor Jean Améry, one of his “*héroes civiles e íntimos de la palabra escrita*” (“*Destierro*” 99). Muñoz Molina has published several texts about his formative connection to Aub. The most significant is his 1996 official speech accepting membership in the Royal Spanish Academy. In this markedly institutional context, Muñoz Molina presents himself as an “*involuntario usurpador*” of Aub’s place in the academy: “[u]surpamos el lugar ... de quienes podrían haber obtenido con más mérito lo que el azar reservó para nosotros” (“*Destierro*” 93). The usurpation is justified insofar as Muñoz Molina’s real speech revolves around the speech Aub wrote in exile accepting an imaginary membership in the academy. According to Muñoz Molina, Aub is a political and a literary exile “*sin patria y sin lectores*” who has to be rehabilitated because he legitimately belonged in the Spanish

academy and in what Muñoz Molina calls the “ciudadanía de la literatura” (“Destierro” 93, 117). Muñoz Molina concludes his official speech by granting Aub’s work a key role in the resurgence of Spain from the “cataclismo” that the civil war brought on: “yo no creo que la cultura española pueda lograr su verdadera plenitud si no recobra la tradición abolida en 1939” (“Destierro” 117). Muñoz Molina thus becomes the reader that Aub supposedly needed in order to return to his cultural fatherland and recover what he calls his “ciudadanía de la literatura.” By supplementing Aub’s absence with his own presence and testimony, Muñoz Molina—self-declared symbolic usurper of Aub’s place—can, presumably, claim and represent the theoretical “plenitud” of Spanish culture.

Here, however, national cultural “plenitud” depends on the paradoxical assimilation of a writer who, as Muñoz Molina himself acknowledges, was “[j]udío, alemán, francés, valenciano, apátrida, mexicano, peregrino en su patria, regresado al destierro y muerto en él” (“Destierro” 114). Although the combination of these circumstances is quite rare, perhaps unique, in the twentieth century Spanish cultural field, Muñoz Molina depicts Aub as a literary and political archetype, a “leyenda ... del escritor republicano exiliado” (“Destierro” 100). More importantly, Muñoz Molina claims that Aub seemed to be able to rebel against the fate of a “porvenir obligatorio,” and to overcome his exceptionality: “decidió ser español, un español demócrata y de izquierdas, sin más raíces que las elegidas por él mismo” (“Destierro” 105, 107, 114). However, Aub’s experience of exile was very different from that of other Spanish Republican exile writers whom Muñoz Molina admires such as Antonio Machado or Manuel Azaña. Aub did have other roots which he could not choose to own or disown in the special historical circumstances in which he lived. I would contend that Aub’s literature testifies to this singular experience of alienation. More precisely, it testifies to the tension between the concrete reality of

being, as Aub claimed, “de ninguna parte” and what Muñoz Molina calls his desire to be Spanish (*Diario* 128; “Destierro” 114).

Muñoz Molina’s attempt at restoring Aub’s standing in the Spanish cultural field brings out Aub’s exceptionality and, thus, the tensions involved in promoting a national cultural memory from a cosmopolitan perspective. Muñoz Molina’s symbolic usurpation of Aub’s place constitutes a paradox because, by turning Aub into a central paradigm, a legend, of the Spanish Republican exile, he disregards Aub’s experience of other-rootedness—the very experience that Aub could not possibly choose to disregard. Thus, both writers can be rooted or re-rooted in Muñoz Molina’s imagined community of an ideal full-fledged progressive Spanish culture. By the same token, Muñoz Molina can claim the distinguished intellectual legacy of an alienated victim, while being safely ensconced in today’s Spanish cultural field. As we shall see, this gesture anticipates a key rhetorical move of the narrator in Muñoz Molina’s book *Sefarad*: that of identifying himself with a prestigious literary community of victims such as Primo Levi or Jean Amery. The narrator can belong to this community only if their particular experiences of repression are universalized by means of a unifying narrative voice (Gómez L.-Quiñones 64-65).

In Muñoz Molina’s “ciudadanía de la literatura,” exile from space and time is somehow suspended, so that, to him, Aub’s imaginary speech feels real and his own real speech feels “maxaubianamente imaginario” (“Destierro” 117-18). In this and other depictions of Aub, Muñoz Molina tends to abstract the historical context of the Spanish civil war so as to illustrate a certain trans-historical Spanishness: Aub is “un ejemplo de ... esa clase de ciudadanía y de inteligencia españolas ... que para nuestra desgracia acabó demasiadas veces en el infortunio y el exilio” (“Destierro” 114). Muñoz Molina has tied the experience of reading Aub’s novels during the last years of Franco’s dictatorship to a “nostalgia doble del porvenir y del pasado, del mañana

en el que podríamos respirar y vivir en libertad y del lejano ayer en el que la libertad existió brevemente” (“Notas” n. pag.). The destroyed Spanish Second Republic thus becomes part of Sepharad, the textual commonplace to which Muñoz Molina can only desire to “go back” because it is unattainable: “I am a grandchild of the generation of García Lorca, of the great writers of the Civil War era. These artists are like the new Sephardim in the sense that they have been expelled from their country. And they have preserved the best of Spanish culture” (“Company” n. pag.).

If Sepharad is Muñoz Molina’s master metaphor for destruction, expulsion or loss, Aub is, for him, the epitome of the Sephardic exile—one who witnessed and gave testimony to the loss of the various communities from which Muñoz Molina feels exiled and to which he desires to return. As exemplary Sephardic witness, Aub is behind Muñoz Molina’s perception of what he calls the “apocalipsis” of twentieth century Europe (“Destierro” 100). By invoking Aub’s name, Muñoz Molina wishes to connect his imagined Spanish culture with the European culture of progressive intellectuals represented in *Sefarad*, such as Walter Benjamin, Eugenia Ginzburg, Arthur Koestler, Victor Klemperer, Nadezhda Mandelstam, or Willi Münzenberg. In a 1997 lecture significantly titled “Max Aub: una mirada española y judía sobre las ruinas de Europa,” Muñoz Molina tentatively claims that, as a Jew, Aub was able to look into the past and into the future, since he “casi heredaba la tradición de lealtad y destierro de los sefardíes” (127). Furthermore, Jewishness helped Aub, “a ser consciente, con clarividencia precoz, de la forma particular y definitiva del cataclismo europeo que iba culminar en los campos de exterminio” (127). Thus, Aub is depicted as moving beyond the concrete historical circumstances in which he lived and wrote so as to become a sort of Virgilian guide in Muñoz Molina’s trans-historical journey to Sepharad, past and future.

Moreover, Muñoz Molina claims that the Spanish civil war is part of a European disaster which he describes as “un cataclismo único en la historia del mundo, tanto en la escala de su destrucción como en la cualidad planificada y sistemática de la saña con que ésta se llevó a cabo” (“Max” 120). By metonymic slippage, the war in Spain is connected to the Holocaust. Despite the difficulty of comparing Franco’s repression with Nazi violence, Muñoz Molina takes as his frame of reference the definition of genocide as intentional coordinated destruction used at the Nuremberg trials.⁴ This metonymic slippage is strengthened by his use of generic terms: “el totalitarismo aspira a anegar la vida individual en una masa unánime ... Nadie está a salvo” (“Max” 133-135). “Nadie está a salvo” is a key leitmotif in Muñoz Molina’s reading of Aub’s work. “Noche de Europa” is also drawn from Aub’s writings: “[e]ntre la riada de fugitivos de la noche de Europa ... están casi todas la inteligencias mayores del siglo XX,” Muñoz Molina adds (“Max” 126). Channeled through the narrator’s voice in *Sefarad*, leitmotifs such as “nadie está a salvo” and “noche de Europa” link the many disparate testimonial stories that make up the text and allow Muñoz Molina to offer a panoramic view of Europe’s “cataclismo único,” where “la gran noche ... está cruzada de largos trenes siniestros” and “tampoco hay nadie de quien pueda decirse con toda seguridad que está a salvo” (*Sefarad* 49, 285). Spain would be inextricably linked to this cataclysm thanks to Aub’s supposedly all-encompassing gaze. Thus, in *Sefarad*, Holocaust survivors Levi and Améry are not safe, but neither are, trans-historically enough, “people who are sick” (“Dreaming” n. pag.). Even the reader does not seem to be safe: “puedes entrar al café de todos los días creyendo que nada se ha modificado ni en ti ni en el mundo exterior y comprobar en el periódico que ya no eres quien creías que eras y no estás a salvo de la persecución y la infamia” (*Sefarad* 457). Addressed by the second person singular pronoun, the reader is also drawn into a potentially disastrous situation.

Muñoz Molina's perspective explains the relations of equivalence prevalent in his testimonial literature. His anti-fictional rhetoric draws on an idea of testimony as a self-evident account of an event, as if experience could be seamlessly narrated and there were no gaps between bearing witness and testimony: "Apenas hay detalles, y da pereza inventarlos, falsificarlos, profanar con la usurpación de un relato lo que fue parte dolorosa y real de la experiencia de alguien" (*Sefarad* 179). As Dominick LaCapra has shown, gaps between bearing witness and testimony do exist (61). In *Sefarad* there is a tension between the obvious artifice of the text and the earnest statements by the narrator and the author about their anti-fictional textual strategies. According to the narrator, "[l]os hechos de la realidad dibujan tramas inesperadas a las que no puede atreverse la ficción" (*Sefarad* 214). "He inventado muy poco en las historias y las voces que se cruzan en este libro," Muñoz Molina writes in an author's note (*Sefarad* 597). In his account of the lives of witnesses like Primo Levi, Muñoz Molina also claims that he didn't "really have to invent anything," since he felt as though *Sefarad* was "writing itself" ("Company" n. pag.). I would argue, however, that symbolic usurpation occurs in *Sefarad* precisely for lack of "invention"—as Muñoz Molina would say—, that is, for lack of a defamiliarizing distance between the narrator's account and the witness's testimony. This distance might have made it easier to recognize or rather to acknowledge singularity of experience. If defamiliarization is the literary technique whereby the reader sees common things in an uncommon way, in testimonies of an extreme experience defamiliarization can allow uncommon things to be seen in their singularity, strangeness and even obscurity. Or rather, in Dominick LaCapra's words, testimony can be understood as the textual gap between experience and expression: "the fallible attempt to verbalize or otherwise bearing witness" (61).

Symbolic usurpation of the witness's testimony is most evident in Muñoz Molina's account of the experience of Jean Améry, of all people: "Eres Jean Améry viendo un paisaje de prados y árboles por la ventanilla del coche en el que lo llevan preso al cuartel de la Gestapo" (*Sefarad* 462). Here the narrator states straightforwardly that the reader is seeing what Améry saw, as if Améry's experience could be conveyed transparently. However, this is precisely the moment chosen by Améry as an illustration of the discrepancy between witnessing and testimony, let alone the recounting of a testimony by another writer. Améry claimed that even in "normal life" "reality is nothing but codified abstraction" and only exceptionally "do we truly stand face to face with the event" (26). In the case of an event that places the most extreme demands on us, there is "never an imaginative power that could even approach its reality;" therefore, "that someone is carried away shackled in a car by the Gestapo is 'self-evident' only when you read about it in the newspaper" (Améry 25-26). It should be remembered that Améry is the very witness who feared that the term Holocaust would be blurred into larger categories.

Améry wrote, "everything is self-evident, and nothing is self-evident as soon as we are thrust into a reality whose light blinds us and burns us to the bone" (26). The narrator of *Sefarad*, however, imagines himself unproblematically seeing what Améry saw, sharing it transparently—infallibly—with the reader, and even becoming Améry himself. He makes the experience of a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust seem familiar, turning it into an abstraction so that Améry's individual place can be symbolically usurped. Using the second person singular pronoun, he also invites the reader to imagine him or herself in Améry's situation. As the narrator explains elsewhere in the text: "Estoy muy dotado para intuir esa clase de angustia" (*Sefarad* 225). The addressed reader could reply with Susan Sontag's words from *Regarding the Pain of Others*: "'We'—this 'we' is everyone who has never experienced anything like what they went

through—don't understand. We don't get it. We truly can't imagine what it was like" (125).⁵ Sepharad understood as a metaphor of destruction, expulsion, or loss allows Muñoz Molina to "naturally identify with those who are left out": "When I was a child, the history of Spain that was taught was the official Catholic history: We were Catholics, we expelled the Jews. I naturally rebelled against all that. If traditional Spain expelled the Jews, I had to identify with the Jews" ("Dreaming" n. pag.). This identification allows for a narrowing of the gap between experience and expression.

III. Max Aub's Rhetoric of Alterity, Plurivocality and Obscurity

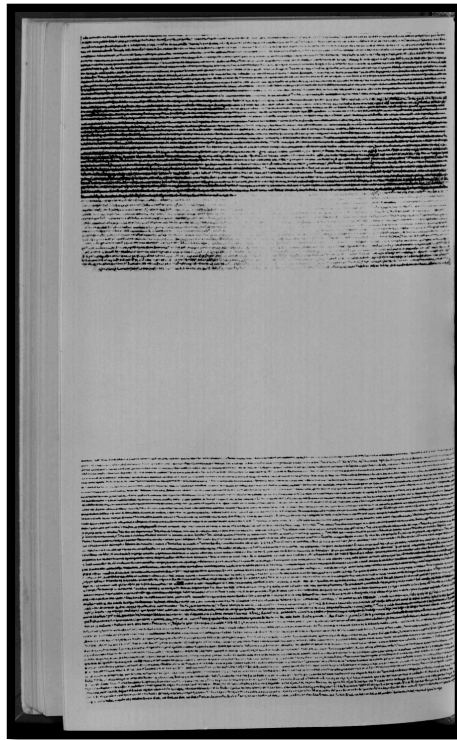
Max Aub's rhetoric of testimony draws on a different premise, the necessity of a rhetoric of fiction and invention, and thus, the opening of the gap between experience and expression: "Testimonié ... [C]reo que la ficción es el único medio posible (útil) de hollar, de dejar rastro, de testimoniar" ("Nuevos" 209). In this sense, Molina's defense of an anti-fictional rhetoric is at odds with Aub's decided defense of a rhetoric of fiction as a means for writing about his experience of alienation. Always already exiled, Aub's dominant testimonial tropes are, as I said, the alias and the apocryphal. In Spanish, alias can mean both "nickname" and "otherwise." Etymologically, alias is a marker of difference. It also means "at another time," "in another place." Apocryphal can mean false, fictitious, of doubtful authenticity; it implies something secret and obscure. These tropes resonate with the definition of exile suggested by Claudio Guillén as an experience of linguistic, temporal and spatial displacement (83). Aub's use of apocryphal voices and documents shape all his literature in various ways. A sterling example of this apocryphal bent is *Jusep Torres Campalans*, Aub's fictional biography of a fictitious Catalan painter, described as one of the co-founders of Cubism. The 1958 edition of this apocryphal

biography included illustrations and photos created by Aub. *Jusep Torres Campalans* has sometimes been listed as a biography of a real painter.

In *Diary of Djelfa*, Aub's 1944 testimonial book of poems about his experiences in an Algerian concentration camp, Aub claims that all that is narrated in the book is "real sucedido" (7). Yet the testimony is far from self-evident since, as he explains, "sólo mis compañeros muertos y enterrados en Djelfa, el millar de sobrevivientes, podrán, quizá, captar lo que aquí se apunta" (8). Indeed, Aub deems the poems to be "inimaginados o inimaginables" (7). This first defamiliarizing gesture, underscoring a certain fallibility of testimony, is compounded by a poem titled "Alias" (80). This poem makes no direct reference to the camp or any other historical events. It is a baroque meditation on the conflicts and tensions between language and identity. The first stanza reads: "En este mundo todo son apodos, / alias, dichos y modos, / por mal nombre o por bueno / no valgo lo que soy, sí lo que sueno" (80). The poem ends on a skeptical note about the ambivalent power of language: words "llenan pliego tras pliego / dando en decir lo que no pueden" (80).

As if to supplement the incapacity of words to name the witness and give an account of his experiences, *Diary of Djelfa* incorporates several photographs. Tellingly, one of these photographs supposedly reproduces the sheets—or "pliegos"—of which the manuscript of the diary was made. However, as critic Bernard Sicot has shown, this image is that of an apocryphal manuscript: it is sheer artifice (420-421). Aub went as far as to counterfeit the physical evidence of his own diary of the concentration camp, as though he were trying to impress upon the reader the obscure nature of the words used in his testimony. Indeed, the text reproduced in the photograph is illegible. Some of the lines are so blotted that they look censored. Curiously enough, Aub seems to warn the reader about this illegibility or fallibility in the foreword to the

diary: “Esta poesía atada al recuerdo, se desdibuja, palidece y cobra virtud fantasmal según los fantasmas de cada lector, que si de lo vivo a lo pintado piérdese una dimensión, ¡qué no perderá en lo escrito!” (*Djelfa* 8). The poem’s lines are therefore “unimaginable” in another sense: we cannot picture them as such. Susan Sontag’s words take here an added poignancy: “we truly can’t imagine what it was like” at *Djelfa* because Aub’s verses are uncannily obscure (125).



Photograph of the “apocryphal manuscript” inserted, according to Bernard Sicot, by Max Aub in *Diario de Djelfa*. Courtesy of Editorial Joaquín Mortiz S. A.

To obscure these ghostly matters even more, Aub includes on the back cover of *Diary of Djelfa* a short story, “Ver y creer” signed by the very real Guatemalan author Augusto Monterroso as a deceptive blurb of his text. According to this story, Aub is employing a ghost writer, a Jew who fled Germany but is now hidden in the basement of his house in Mexico City, where “escribe y escribe, a oscuras casi” (*Djelfa* n. pag.). “Ignorante de la realidad,” this ghost

writer comforts himself producing texts about the past. Aub publishes “esas producciones con su propio nombre, pero su prisionero no se entera” (*Djelfa* n. pag.). Yet the story is supposed to date back to 1929, thirteen years before Aub arrived in Mexico. By means of this playful fiction, Aub’s authorship is destabilized and his writings take on an apocryphal tinge. The title of this short story, “Ver y creer,” plays on a paradigmatic figure of witnessing in Christianity, the Doubting Thomas, throwing further into question the evidence shown by Aub’s testimonial poetry.

Aub presents multiple versions of the apocryphal. “El cementerio de Djelfa” (1965) is a short story consisting of the transcription of a letter from Algeria which an anonymous narrator receives in Mexico in a soiled and torn envelope. The sender, a survivor of the Djelfa concentration camp, casts doubt on the evidentiary value of words by underlining the artificiality of his account: “Las palabras son tan pobres frente a los sentimientos que hay que recurrir a mil trucos para dar con el reflejo de la realidad” (79). Whereas in *Diary of Djelfa* Aub does not mention that the photograph of the manuscript may be false, in other texts he will rely on the Cervantean ruse of the found manuscript. His 1952 “Manuscrito Cuervo” is a Swiftian chronicle of the human experience in the concentration camp. With a nod to the series of fictional authors referred to in Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, the manuscript is presented as “traducido fielmente del idioma cuervo por Aben Máximo Albarrón,” and edited by a certain J. R. Bululú (“Manuscrito” 151). All these forms of mediation are further complicated by the fact that the purportedly “true” author of the manuscript is a conspicuously fictional crow named Jacobo, while the translator’s name, Aben Máximo Albarrón, alludes to the name of the story’s author, Max Aub. The crow’s claim that “[t]odo cuanto describa o cuente ha sido visto y observado por mis ojos” underscores the artificiality of both the witness and the testimony, and also, by contrast, the blindness of

human beings (“Manuscrito” 156). Authorship and authenticity are thus always already subverted in the *mise en abîme* of Aub’s favored literary device, the found manuscript. Aub is then well aware that, as LaCapra explains, “any account—representation, narrative, understanding, explanation, form of knowledge—is constitutively limited, notably when it addresses certain phenomena” (“Lanzmann” 242). Among the “phenomena” addressed by Aub’s accounts may be his own singular experiences of alienation and other-rootedness, including “the traumatic effects of limit-experiences” on a survivor of the Djelfa camp—but not of the Final Solution (“Lanzmann” 234).

The idea that a rhetoric of fiction is the only useful means of bearing witness becomes distinctively salient in Aub’s 1963 *Translated Anthology*, a collection of apocryphal poems prefaced by highly particularized biographies of real and fictional poets. As in *Diary of Djelfa*, the apocryphal qualities of the text are strengthened by the uncanny inclusion of the author’s own name. Aub is presented as an enigmatic poet in the third person “no se sabe dónde está [...]. Nadie le conoce. Sus fotografías son evidentes trucos” (*Antología* 244). The evidence of Aub’s “true” identity is thus obscured. This self-effacing presentation, this alias showing Aub otherwise, half-apocryphally, explains why his poems included in the anthology represent him as “cerrado en mí, cegato, mudo” (245). Thus, extrapolating Jean Améry’s words, Aub’s dubious witnesses could also claim that “nothing is self-evident as soon as we are thrust into a reality whose light blinds us” (26). In *French Camp*, a 1964 film script based on his experiences at the Roland Garros prison in Paris and the concentration camp at Le Vernet d’Ariège, Aub memorably stated: “fui ojo, ... no me represento” (7). Thus, for Aub, the act of seeing which defines witnessing implies a disappearing act, the elusive presence of a half-blind individual giving obscure testimonies performing linguistic, spatial and temporal displacements. Aub’s

tropes of testimony, the alias and the apocryphal, entail a rhetoric of fiction and obscurity, and thus preclude usurpation. In 1968, a few years before his death, Aub wrote: “El exiliado murió: lo que ha cambiado es España” (“Diarios” 413). After almost thirty years in exile, the writer reiterated his sense of displacement, while implying the complications that attempts at rehabilitating him to Spanish culture may entail.

IV. Some Conclusions: The Uncanniness of Testimony and National Culture

Although Aub might embody the metaphor of Sepharad, his name is significantly absent from Muñoz Molina’s book of the same title. It could be argued that, responding to a deep anxiety of testimonial influence, Muñoz Molina’s narrator has symbolically usurped Aub’s place. Following Muñoz Molina’s Bloomian idea that writers learn their trade by following a dialectical movement between treason and tradition, the narrator in *Sefarad* could be said to ventriloquize real victims, assuming their voices and subsuming them under his univocal persona (“Discurso” 99). In this sense, universality of experience equals univocality of expression. Muñoz Molina’s misreading of Aub’s diversity of fictional voices as a universal narrative voice may help to answer a key question in memory studies regarding the dynamics of testimonial memory. When witnesses to a specific historical event die, how can future legatees of testimonies best memorialize the singularity of experience?

As Susan Suleiman suggests, although sentiment can be shared even by “authors and readers who were not there,” it is as personal, subjective expression that the experiences of survivors can “most memorably be communicated. Despite the collective nature of the historical event, and of its official commemoration, the meaning of their experience remains, individual rather than collective” (183). Muñoz Molina’s model downplays the defamiliarizing effect that

would indicate readers that someone's experience may have happened "at another time," "in another place," in different ethnic, geographic, patronymic and linguistic conditions. If W. G. Sebald's testimonial novel *Austerlitz*—with which *Sefarad* has been compared—can be considered an example of "the power of imagination to construct the inner world of a child survivor" (Suleiman 212), then Muñoz Molina's "novel of novels" could be said to be an example of the power of imagination to construct the inner world of a reader of testimonial literature who was not there.⁶ In this light, Aub and Muñoz Molina suggest two different models of literary testimony. Aub's plurivocal model posits the obscure specificity of individual experience, whereas Muñoz Molina's univocal model posits the transparent universality of shared sentiment. These different textual strategies highlight in varying degrees the uncanniness of testimony, thus problematizing oppositions such as individual/collective, fiction/fact, literature/history (Felman and Laub 7). As we have seen, Aub's resort to artifice does not undermine his efforts to narrate what he calls "real sucedido" (*Djelfa* 7). *Sefarad*, by contrast, reveals a tension between the artifice of the text and the anti-fictional rhetoric that the narrator and the author proclaim.

For Muñoz Molina, the recuperation of the literary memory of Europe's deadly twentieth century is linked to the denunciation of Spanish "provincianismo intelectual e histórico" in the 1980s ("Obra" n. pag.). In his view, even a few years after Franco's death, Spain continued to be politically isolated and Spaniards still believed that "cuestiones relativas al Gulag y al Holocausto" did not have much to do with them ("Obra" n. pag.). Thus Muñoz Molina can commemorate not only European survivors whose works have been overlooked or disregarded in Spain, but also posthumously forgotten Spanish exile writers such as Manuel Chaves Nogales or Arturo Barea, who in the late thirties opposed "dictaduras comunistas o fascistas" and only

belatedly “vuelven a ser leídos y ... reciben una consideración literaria y política de la que no disfrutaron en España mientras vivían” (“Dos exilios” n. pag.). If remembering the Holocaust can contribute to the “articulation of other histories” of victimhood, then Muñoz Molina rearticulates Spanish history of isolation multi-directionally, in terms of a European cosmopolitan memory (Rothberg 6). From this angle, the cultural importance of *Sefarad* cannot be underestimated. The book was canonized last year by its inclusion in Cátedra Letras Hispánicas, a widely distributed series of annotated classics in Spanish. *Sefarad* has, to date, been translated into eleven languages.

Muñoz Molina’s efforts to break away from Franco’s provincial Spain are nothing short of commendable. Yet, paradoxically enough, his championing of a supposedly “verdadera plenitud” of Spanish culture seems impervious to the “unsettling force” of exile understood as “nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal,” to use Edward Said’s words (186). As Aub’s friend and exile Tomás Segovia skeptically pointed out in a 2003 conference significantly titled “Max Aub: testigo del siglo XX,” institutional efforts to rehabilitate Aub could neutralize the subversive potential of his writings and diminish and Aub’s own “ambigua y paradójica” figure (254). When read against the trans-historical backdrop of Muñoz Molina’s universalizing metaphor, Aub’s testimonies of other-rootedness and other-routedness invite the reader not only to always historicize but also to always spatialize. Indeed, as Paul Jay has shown, current literary and cultural studies are partly defined by a spatial expansion away from national paradigms towards new transnational fields of research. Aub’s particular experience as an exile is eccentric because, at least in the framework of cosmopolitan memory, it goes beyond that of the Spanish Republic to point to an experience of the Holocaust to which it nevertheless cannot fully be assimilated. It thus points to a decentered position toward the Spanish nation. It is in this sense that Aub’s

testimonial rhetoric posits the challenge of reconciling “a kind of universalism with the legitimacy of some forms of partiality” (Appiah 223).

Mari Paz Balibrea has pointed out that the politics of recuperation of the testimonies written by Spanish Republican exiles should preserve “as a critical position the marginality ... of exile” from the nation (13). Aub’s desire to return to Spain is well-known. As he wrote in 1969: “Te deshaces en deseos: te consume la furia del amor hacia un pasado que no fue, por un futuro imposible” (*La gallina ciega* 311). Much to his dismay, returning to Spain left much to be desired, and, at least to him, true plenitude seemed certainly unattainable. It is this seemingly irresolvable tension inscribed in Aub’s self-reflexive form of desire that would align his writings with those of other exiled Spanish writers such as Antonio Machado and Luis Cernuda: “their poetry oscillates between a critical rhetoric of fragmentation and a lyrical rhetoric of attachment, between exclamations of political dissidence and avowals or irrepressible belonging” (Epps and Fernández Cifuentes 38). And yet Aub’s experience of exile was also different from that of Machado or Cernuda to the extent that, as we have seen, he had other roots which he could not choose to own or disown. In this sense, his writings testify to a specific contrapuntal, uncanny tension between the concrete reality of being, as he averred, “de ninguna parte” and his unattainable desire to return to a certain idea of Spain (Aub, *Diario* 128). In this light, Aub’s position toward the nation was eccentric twice over, and perhaps it should be remembered as such in order to suggest different spaces of reflection on the discursive strategies of testimonial memory, and thus to offer critical perspectives on attempts to attain whatever form of national cultural plenitude.

Notes

¹ Antonio Muñoz Molina is arguably one of the most prominent public intellectuals in Spain today. He publishes regularly in *El País*, one of the most widely read newspapers in the Spanish-speaking world. He is a member of the Royal Spanish Academy and he has served as the director of the Cervantes Institute in New York, where he now teaches at New York University. He has received countless awards. In 2013, he won the prestigious Jerusalem Literary Prize. Among the winners of his prize are Milan Kundera, Octavio Paz, Jorge Semprún, and Susan Sontag. Muñoz Molina has thus become an important international literary figure. This essay owes valuable insights to Antonio Gómez L.-Quiñones's analyses of Holocaust representations in Spanish culture, as well as to James Iffland, Christopher Maurer, and Christina L. Svendsen.

² There is an ample bibliography about Antonio Muñoz Molina's and Max Aub's respective literary projects. For the specific connection between identity, memory, and modes of representation, and its possible relevance in discussions about the testimonial rhetoric in Muñoz Molina's work, see Ferrán, Herzberger, Labanyi, Navajas, and Pérez-Simón. For Aub, see Caudet, Fernández, Mainer, Pérez Bowie, and Sánchez Zapatero.

³ The title of Preston's book has been faulted because the repression to which the title refers "differed qualitatively as well as quantitatively from the cold-blooded planning and industrial-scale implementation of the Nazi Holocaust" (Treglown n. pag.). By contrast, Helen Graham, who in 2002 claimed that for the Francoist project of "national reordering" the Spanish working classes became what the Jews were to the Nazi people's community (*Spanish Republic* 123), has praised the title of Preston's book for the "category shift" it may effect, suggesting "parallels and resonances" between the Spanish case and the Holocaust, as well as "a deeper

understanding of Europe's dark mid-twentieth century as a whole" ("Spanish Holocaust" n. pag.). This "category shift" has been taken to reframe the Spanish civil war "as in part an ethnic conflict" because, as Sebastiaan Faber has argued, "Franco's reign of terror, like that of Hitler and Goebbels, was carefully planned and systematically executed" ("Spanish Holocaust" n. pag.). For a good summary of the controversy, see Helen Graham, Jo Labanyi, Jorge Marco, Paul Preston, and Michael Richards.

⁴ In defining the "cataclismo único" in these terms, Muñoz Molina invites the connection between violence during the Spanish Civil War and the systematic destruction of national, racial, religious or political groups during Second World War, even though he does not use terms such as genocide or extermination. See Julius Ruiz for the problems involved in calling Francoist repression genocidal (175).

⁵ Muñoz Molina avers that "los libros los escriben los escritores, y ponen en ellos lo único que tienen, que es la experiencia de su propia vida, la aleación única de temperamento y cultura de la que está hecho cada uno de nosotros" ("Max" 124). The author of *Sefarad* made this assertion despite "lo que digan esos pervertidos universitarios del lacanismo, la desconstrucción, el posestructuralismo y demás basura franconorteamericana" ("Max" 124). To this one could answer with Susan Suleiman's words: "even the notion that testimony, whether literary or not, inevitably comprises elements of fiction is by now a commonplace—we are all postmodernists in that regard; we know that every narrative is constructed, no matter how 'simple' or 'artless' it may appear" (139). LaCapra has warned that "any attentive secondary witness to, or acceptable account of, traumatic experiences must in some significant way be marked by trauma or allow trauma to register in its own procedures" ("Lanzmann" 244). In this sense, the "transparent" account of Améry's experience given by the narrator in *Sepharad* can be argued to fall into a

certain “positivism” to the extent that it follows “the idea that an objectifying notational system can ideally represent, transparently render, or capture the essence of an object” (“Lanzmann” 239).

⁶ For possible links between *Austerlitz* and *Sefarad*, see Martín-Estudillo.

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